WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

   1. A method for testing software on a test computer
having a base configuration, comprising the steps of:

   storing the base configuration of the test computer
5 on a portable boot drive of the test computer;

   transferring the portable boot drive of the
preceding step from the test computer to a master image
computer;

   creating a master image of the base configuration by
10 copying an image from the portable boot drive to storage
of the master image computer;

   transferring the portable boot drive back to the
test computer;

   executing one or more tests on the test computer;
15   copying the master image of the base configuration
onto a portable boot drive;

   transferring the portable boot drive of the
preceding step from the master computer to the test
computer; and
20   booting the test computer from the portable boot
drive, thereby restoring the test computer to the base
configuration.

2.   A method of testing computer software on a test computer having a base configuration, comprising the steps of:

storing data representing the base configuration of the test computer on a portable boot drive of the test computer;

creating a master image of the base configuration by copying an image of the portable boot drive to storage of the master image computer;

testing the computer software on the test computer, using the base configuration;

copying the master image of the base configuration onto a portable boot drive;

transferring the portable boot drive of the preceding step from the master computer to the test computer; and

booting the test computer from the portable boot drive, thereby restoring the test computer to the base configuration.

3.   The method of Claim 2, wherein the storing step is performed with the same portable boot drive as the transferring step.

4.   The method of Claim 2, wherein the creating step is performed by transferring a portable boot drive from the test computer to the master computer.

5.   The method of Claim 2, wherein the creating step is performed by communicating the image of the portable boot drive over a network from the test computer to the master computer.

6.   The method of Claim 2, wherein the testing step comprises installing new software onto the test computer.

7.   The method of Claim 2, further comprising the steps of repeating the testing, transferring, and booting steps.

8.   The method of Claim 2, wherein the copying step is performed prior to or during the testing step.

9.   The method of Claim 2, wherein the copying step is repeated for a batch of portable boot drives.

10.   The method of Claim 2, wherein the storing and creating steps are repeated for a number of base configurations of the test computer, and the copying step is performed by selecting one of the number of base configurations.

11.   The method of Claim 2, wherein the testing step is performed by using software already part of the base configuration.

12.   A method of testing computer software, using
one or more alternate base configurations of a test
computer, comprising the steps of:

storing data representing one or more base

5   configurations of the test computer on portable boot
drives of the test computer;

creating a master image of each base configuration
by copying an image of each portable boot drive to
storage of the master image computer;

10   testing the computer software on the test computer,
using one of the base configurations;

selecting a base configuration for subsequent
testing of the test computer;

copying a master image of the selected base

15   configuration onto a portable boot drive;

transferring the portable boot drive of the
preceding step from the master computer to the test
computer; and

booting the test computer from the portable boot

20   drive, thereby configuring the test computer with the
selected base configuration.

13.   The method of Claim 12, wherein each base
configuration represents a configuration for a different

25   operating system of the test computer.

14.   The method of Claim 12, wherein the storing
step is performed with the same portable boot drive as
the transferring step.

15. The method of Claim 12, wherein the creating step is performed by transferring a portable boot drive from the test computer to the master computer.

16. The method of Claim 12, wherein the creating step is performed by communicating the image of the portable boot drive over a network from the test computer to the master computer.

17. The method of Claim 12, wherein the testing step comprises installing new software onto the test computer.

18. The method of Claim 12, further comprising the steps of repeating the testing, transferring, and booting steps.

19. The method of Claim 12, wherein the copying step is performed prior to or during the testing step.

20. The method of Claim 12, wherein the testing step is performed by using software already part of the base configuration.